Learning Skills: Connecting Process and Structure for Student Centered Distance Learning

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Abstract

Life-long learning is a process. Learning skill ability is common to all as well as individually unique. A learner's beliefs are constantly susceptible to conditioning from external expectations. A discussion reflects on techniques for strengthening distance-learning skills in this technological age.

Distance Learning, Process, and Structure

Online Internet distance learning requires due diligence as the students should engage with a process for planning learning. Distance learning requires self-regulation for planning the learning process through structured practices. Learning practices often become habitual practices with assumptions based on prior learning experience. Distance learning requires a self-cognitive approach for successful outcomes. How a student views learning is vitally important to the benefit of the convenience of learning online. When processes for learning are viewed as structured prioritized methods, distance learning students can revise learning skills to improve productivity and successful learning. How these processes are viewed and understood is vital to the distance learning student outcome for life-long learning.

Locus of Control and Learning Skills

Locus of control characteristics has significant influence on learning outcomes. According to Kutanİs, Mescİ, and Övdür (2011) "Internal or external locus of control plays an important role for students to sustain the efficacy and usefulness of learning performance" (p. 114). External locus of control and internal locus of control are opposing constructs at each end of a continuum. Loci of control concepts provide a theory to explain how an individual's beliefs affect attitudes of his or her capability for controlling life events (Strauser, Ketz, & Keim, 2002). Every individual possesses attributes that reflect the precepts of locus of control theory. Locus of control can significantly influence an individual's approach towards how they learn. Learning is a process of growth reflected in the determination of change in performance. Driscoll (2005) explains, "Learning is a persistant change in performance or performance potential that results from experience and interaction with the world" (p. 1). Understanding that learning how to learn

is an applied skill is a vital metacognitive approach for individuals. How we learn is vastly more important that what we learn.

Individuals influenced by external locus of control often relate events, situational circumstances, successes, and failures to factors not under their control. The individual will justify the outcome of a situation due to the influence of the event (Kutanİs, Mescİ & Övdür, 2011). Individuals affected by external locus of control traits demonstrate that efforts to improve learning skills may be frivolous or even dangerous. The individual succumbs to the belief that events have control of their lives. They may resist behavioral change influences using external events to justify their actions (Kutanİs, Mescİ, & Övdür, 2011). Educational classroom experiences can negatively affect an individual's learning skills resulting in demonstrating poor outcomes.

Individuals influenced by internal locus of control characteristics believe they can control their life despite external events. They believe they are responsible for outcomes. They demonstrate a strong belief in their abilities to manage learning processes regardless of external events. They are not suspicious of change since they feel responsible for their own actions (Kutanİs, Mescİ & Övdür, 2011). Learners exhibiting strong internal locus of control characteristics reflect self-regulation through the demonstration of improved learning skills. Self-regulated learners revise skills through reflection on the learning experience. How results are reached is more important than just reaching the goal. The metacognitive abilities of the individual are strengthened through self-reflection.

Learners unaware of locus of control influence on learning beliefs often become complacent with how they learn and take their current learning processes for granted. For example, an online distance learner may assume that using the same approach for all online

courses will return similar results of an exceptional grade. The individual defaults to using the same tactic in all subsequent online courses because they may assume that the results should be the same. However, learning habits are formed over time. The learner must learn to change the process to improve the result. Changing the process requires reviewing formative feedback to revise the original process. How we learn to learn is demonstrated in the ability to manage and strengthen learning habits. Learning from experience is a valuable asset contributing to a continuous desire for growth at any age. Learning from experience requires revising the procedures used to obtain a different result. Dewey (1997) advocates learning through experience, as every current experience is action affecting future experiences.

The Belief System and Learning Expectations

The self-fulfilling prophecy coined the Pygmalion effect is a psychological concept that has influence on learners educational practice with positive or negative effects on student beliefs and therefore, performance. Self-confidence and efficacy are vital components of a student's belief system. Field (1989) posited, "Self-Altering Prophecies are expectations by a source person that when communicated lead to behaviours of a target person that would not have occurred had the prophecy not been made" (151). Students form expectations conditioned from past educational experiences that have significant influence on self-esteem and beliefs about their learning skill abilities. Prior learning experiences have a powerful influence on efficacy. Instructional practitioners should possess an awareness of the self-fulfilling prophecy, as formative feedback provided to students must focus on the approach used to complete the content and not on correction. Instructional practices that only target correction do not strengthen the student learning processes. The focus of corrective practices targets the result and not the process for how the result was reached. Targeting only correction can negatively affect learner

efficacy and confidence. Providing realistic formative feedback to students that is focused on the revision of process is essential for positive student motivation.

Similar to the self-fulfilling prophecy is the self-defeating prophecy. The two approaches are elements of the four Self-Altering Prophecies. The self-defeating prophecy from an optimistic approach effects with suppression while the self-fulfilling prophecy from the pessimistic approach reflects confirmed failure belief (Field, 1989, p. 152). Learners conditioned through classroom experiences to believe that they are not good at a skill will demonstrate the failure as their belief about their capability is realized in the learning process results. Friedrich et al (2014) posits, "Pygmalion effects have high scientific and practical relevance due to their potentially positive or negative effects on important student outcomes" (p. 1).

Internet Distance Instructional Strategy

Student learning expectations influence student learning outcomes. Instructors are considered subject matter experts and therefore students place value on instructor opinions. Instructor awareness for how communication occurs is a significant factor. How the student interprets the instructor's communication has influence on self-talk. Therefore, the instructor must guide the student's understanding of formative feedback to avoid the student reacting judgmentally. Learning skill growth and real life experience motivate learners to self-direction (Gordon, 2004). Self-talk is an active component of emotional intelligence influenced through the affective domain. Depape et al. (2006) purports "Self-talk has been discussed in literature as a means of enhancing self-awareness and self-regulation, both of which are considered important in the construct of emotional intelligence" (p. 250). Self-actualization is an integral component of emotional intelligence demonstrated in self-regulation. Self-regulation in learning is a fundamental construct involving the learner's ability to establish a structured process for

learning. The strengthening of metacognition is one of the benefits of developing self-regulation learning skill having positive influence on the learner's belief system. Self-regulated learners "Set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features of the environment" (Pintrich, 2000, p. 453 as cited in Driscoll, 2005).

Constructive Internet based distance learning requires self-regulation. Questions that distance learners should be asking themselves include why online, how online, what online, and where online. Too often, the enticement for entering into a distance learning endeavor is motivated by reaching a learning goal believed to be easier because it is convenient. The good intent is the desire to receive a degree encouraged by a financial gain expectation. The degree path is an external process often tied to employer or federal financial support. Therefore, learners often engage with passive learning habits focused on what works best to obtain the best grade versus how learning skills can be strengthened to earn the best grade. Instructors must target student reality to reinforce a student's development of internal expectations. A student's reality is a valid belief in the moment. Creating teachable moments for distance learners requires an instructor to engage the student with positive motivation by providing guidance for improving how the distance learner can succeed in learning the discipline through earning the grade. Students should be viewed as the product of the educational process and not consumer of the process. The customer of an educational institution is the employer that will hire the graduate.

Focusing on learning skill objectives for comprehensive reading and writing vary requiring different approaches as the online instructor does not have the physical presence of the student for assessment of learning. Therefore, instructional activities designed with only instructor expectations targeting grades can have detrimental effects on the student learning

beliefs. Traditional educational strategy focuses on the presentation of content. Instructors are often invested in delivery of the content resulting in students becoming passive receivers of content and not active users of content.

The sage on the stage is a traditional instructional practice that has become outdated. According to King (1993),

> The sage on the stage instructional approach involves the one who has the knowledge and transmits that knowledge to the students, who simply memorize the information and later reproduce it on an exam--often without even thinking about it. This model of the teaching-learning process, called the transmittal model, assumes that the student's brain is like an empty container into which the professor pours knowledge. (p. 1)

Sage on the stage traditional approaches to instruction place the instructor as the central figure in the place of teaching. Students are considered recipients of content delivery. Instructors, performing as subject matter experts, provide students with content presentations where the student is responsible for clarification of the content. Students are required to meet standards regardless of their learning skill awareness. The focus is on the correctness of the content and not the process of learning how the content should be applied. In addition, how the student intends to use the knowledge in the real world is assumed versus discussed. The sage on the stage instructors loses the opportunity to stimulate the student's creative tension for revision of learning skills. Often, the preference of learning is referred to as learning style. Instructors often use the term learning style to describe how a student is learning. Describing how a student learns using the term learning style does not target learning skills. Instead, the student becomes dependent on the belief that is their best or only approach for learning. Learning skills are common to all and yet unique to each individual according to their differing strengths of

modality. According to research on the subject of learning styles completed by Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, and Bjork, (2009) "We conclude therefore, that at present, there is no adequate evidence base to justify incorporating learning styles assessments into general educational practice" (p. 105). Learning styles is a pervasive term used by many to define an individual's preferred learning habits. The term has been a common means to describe how an individual learns for several years. However, the term learning styles is not actually relevant for the demonstration of performance. According to research completed by Marshik (2015), the selection of auditory, kinesthetic, or visual modality to learn does not enhance learning skills. Research has shown that learning outcomes are the same regardless of the learner's modality strength.

Distance learners may be motivated by a false sense of security as the assumption of convenience outweighs the process. Distance learning involves the assessment of individual written deliverables as a means for determination of meeting learning objectives. Perceptions of grading are used by the learner to assume the learning objectives have been reached satisfactorily. The grading process becomes an extrinsic motivational conditioning. Students learn early through experience that grades matter. Extrinsic reward conditioning does not strengthen the individuals learning habits. Rewards are in the moment satisfying instant gratification or reinforcing external dissatisfaction with the instructional process. Schaps and Lewis (n.d.) stated,   "Extrinsic rewards are not needed to stimulate student engagement and perseverance. Rather, we find that rewards may indeed undermine intrinsic motivation" (p. 81). Formal testing, often only summative, contrasts comparative percentiles to determine successful learning. However, actual learning is not assessed. Conditioning of students passively results in students not actively participating with subject content experience. Instead, learners are more

often engaged with test taking experiences versus an active demonstration of performance to reflect learned knowledge.

      An alternative instructional strategy is the guide on the side. The guide on the side approach involves using instructional activities that motivate student interaction through stimulating student interest. The guide on the side instructor still presents course material. However, the student centered learning interaction is the target (King, 1993). By targeting the student's learning skills, the instructor engages the student with formative interaction to understand how the student is using their learning skills. The process behind the student's result is more important than the correctness of the result. Student reflection is continually stimulated through engagement with critical thinking. Students are more motivated to become active participants in the instructional practice. Instructors perform as guides with suggestions and questions motivating the student to question self-thinking and actions. Learning skills are discussed with individual students by the instructor with the subject integration. Students are encouraged to revise learning structures to develop consistency of habit. By developing their effectiveness as learners, students can be empowered to take responsibility for their own learning by understanding how they can revise and strengthen the skills necessary to learn in regions that are uncomfortable for them (Keeton, Sheckley, & Griggs, 2002). Managing learning time, improving reading comprehension, cultivating scholarly writing skill, strengthening critical thinking skills, revising self-regulation, and refining active listening are direct benefits from the guide on the side instructional strategy.

      The guide on the side instructional strategy advocates using formative assessment. Formative assessment is ongoing and not a summative evaluation of the student deliverables. Formative assessment is in process feedback returned to students, which should be viewed as

learning opportunities and not judgements. How a student views instructional formative feedback has significant influence on the benefits of the educational journey. Students reviewing formative guidance targeting learning skills should be guided to learn to review feedback objectively to revise practices. Stiggins (1999) stated, "Wise teachers use the classroom assessment process as an instructional intervention to teach the lesson that failure is acceptable at first, but that it cannot continue. Improvement must follow" (p. 196).

Good online teaching strategy employs Socratic Dialogue as an instructional activity. Using the Socratic Method engages students with examples of probing questions to stimulate deeper thinking (Paul & Elder, 2007). Questioning is not used to solicit specific answers but rather reinforce understanding. Open ended questioning stimulates recall with increased creation of new paths of dendrites and synapses in the brain with present knowledge revised through social negotiation. Boghossian, (2006) posits, concerning constructivist learning, "The purpose of the Socratic Method is give participants a way to arrive at their truth, and the Socratic teacher attempts to guide students to their understanding" (p. 719). The guide on the side strategy encompasses an individual supportive role versus a corrective approach driven by grade expectation. Suggestions on how a student could review learning skills provide opportunity for the student to revise skills improving learning outcomes resulting in a positive learning experience.

Passive Learning versus Active Learning

Learners participating in classroom instruction with the assumption that listening, reading, and taking tests are means that provide the most effective learning strategy reflect passive learning. Learners are not actively involved with the subject matter. Students may spend significant amounts of time reading texts to understand the writers experience and concepts.

8. Grammar and spelling review - review each sentence for structure, clarity, proper grammar, and spelling.

9. Format review - review the complete paper to ensure that the template reference format has not been changed.

10. Review references and citations - check each reference to verify that the reference connects to the correct source.

11. Submit your work to a similarity check - by using a similarity check the writer is verifying that the content as quoted, cited, and referenced is original.

12. Proofread - repeat the four review steps with new eyes at least twice before submitting the work.

Guiding students to engage with structured prioritized processes for strengthening learning skills empowers the student to enhance brain based learning.

Brain based learning processes such as schema and information processing theory suggest that the brain is not made to receive vast amounts of information in short or impromptu sessions. Short sittings or excessive amounts of concentrated time attempting to understand knowledge overwhelms the learner's cognitive processes. Learners may be required to review the material repeatedly attempting to understand. Instead, consistent daily scheduled study periods of no more than 90 minutes enables the user to chunk information through sensory memory into working memory for encoding and retention. The cognitive load theory suggests that sensory memory (working memory) may only hold minimal amounts of knowledge. Chunking is the term used by the cognitive information processing theory to describe how content must be organized for effective processing from working memory through encoding for retention into long term memory. When content is organized in a scaffolded manner to chunk

how much is being taken in per instance, the sensory memory process is not overwhelmed. Learners that refocus their brain on different activities to return to clarification of previous work are building new paths of dendrites and synapses in the brain. The more associations built while engaged with using the required content to complete learning requirement, the stronger the retention of knowledge. Learning is actually taking place as the increase of associations in the brain builds strong schemas for connecting knowledge encoded concepts.

Brain based sensory memory is temporary storage for content that is being sourced into the brain. Whether through reading, visual observation, or hearing, the content is held in working memory for a short period. Once in working memory the content must be acted upon to transfer through to retained memory. Just having knowledge does not mean we know the knowledge. Unless the individual applies the knowledge, it is often lost. Passive learning does not engage the learner with the knowledge through action. Active learning involves the individual with knowledge use. Knowledge becomes retained through the experience. Online distance learners require an understanding of what actions characterize the active learner. How they engage with learning through planning requires developing awareness for how they learn. Passive learners assume the content, active learners experience the content. Passive learning does not motivate discovery.

Active learning is a strong motivator of discovery reflected in the demonstration of divergent and convergent thinking. According to Drapeau (2014), "divergent thinking requires students to think of many different ideas. A student uses divergent thinking to generate different solutions to a problem or a challenge" (p. 4). Generating different solutions involves creative problem solving which strengthens critical thinking. Drapeau (2014) further asserts, "Convergent thinking is when there is only one right idea" (p. 4). When students are focused on being right or

wrong seeking one answer versus seeking different creative solutions learning opportunities are limited. Drapeau (2014) further specifies, a student "uses convergent thinking to decide which" creative solution "provides the best result" (p. 4). Therefore, online instructional strategy that targets the leaner's processes for how they are learning motivates critical thinking and reflection.

Providing suggestions for how a student can revise learning habits empowers the student toward metacognition to revise their learning structures. According to Driscoll (2005), "Objectivism is the view that knowledge of the world comes about through an individual's experience of it" (p. 387). Using knowledge creates additional paths in memory revising and adding to existing knowledge. The more paths of content knowledge through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning actions, the more associations created in the brain. Driscoll (2005) further posits, "Knowledge is constructed by learners as they attempt to make sense of their experiences" (p. 387). The more content experience applied by the student, the more associative connections established for the content in retained knowledge.

Training versus Education

Training and education are connected through similar learning goals. However, training and education differ significantly. Posner (2004) argues training is repetitive exercises using memorization where specific outcomes are expected. Training goals are known specific predictable outcomes. All training participants know how, where, when, and why the learner will use the training. Therefore, building structure of learning processes revises learning skills through rehearsal strengthening learning habits. Education differs as where and how the learner will use the content in the real world is not predictable. Training and educational learning are common in all educational settings. Posner (2004) presents a controversial question, "How much

of schooling and what proportion of each subject should we conceive of as education, and how much should we conceive as training" (p. 71).

We all learn from experience to speak, walk, eat, hear, see, and understand. Speaking and walking are evidential trial and error learning processes. Learning to learn is training the mind to strengthen learning skills. Learning how we learn requires a metacognitive approach continually revising processes for improved results. Dewey (1994) stated, "This condition is satisfied only as the educator views teaching and learning as a continuous process of reconstruction of experience" (p. 87). Learning to learn through authentically evaluating the learning experience prepares learners to manage learning. Learning to manage a structured plan for how time is used is a behavioral conditioning. Practicing good time management for learning provides students with excellent means to strengthen critical thinking as an internal expectation. Learning becomes a beneficial activity instead of a mundane task. Distance learner's that develop consistency in how they structure learning continue to practice brain based learning discipline in daily life.

Online adaptive learning applications are excellent methods for behavioral modification. Creating a technology assessment tool designed to assess student current knowledge status provides instructors with a baseline understanding of the student specific knowledge level. Through adaptive learning tools, student can be encouraged to revise and practice multiple choices and fill in the blank assessments. Guiding distance learners to use course materials to research for correct answers strengthens student time management. Students modify time management learning habits to improve the knowledge through an authentic assessment tool. An important consideration for adaptive learning technology is the guidance of the online instructor. Instructors must engage students with consistency to stimulate student motivation. Using adaptive learning techniques can empower a student to change how they use the tool. This type

of online distance learning behavior provides a means for modification of student expectations. Students become motivated to improve learning processes, as the improved time commitment to earn the best result becomes the focus versus the grade.

Training the mind can be a challenge for individuals that have been conditioned to satisfy external expectations. Dewey (as cited in Archambault, 1974) posits, "it's not the doing that matters, it's the thinking about doing" (p. 321). Students with conditioned extrinsic motivational intentions may use the same processes repeatedly expecting different results. Learning may be reduced to a task oriented listing among many other tasks. Thinking critically about how the learning must be accomplished is often forgotten with the intention of making sure that the learning objective is completed on time. Learning defaults to a task versus a process. Instead of strengthening learning skills through revisions suggested by the instructor, the distance learner places the learning on a list with the intentions of producing improved results. When the results are not what is expected the student will justify the outcome through emotional frustration transferring the justification of the result to an external event. Determination to complete requirements with the best of intentions is always a factor. However, the approach should be to learn from the experience rather than receive a reward from the experience. Students invested in extrinsic motivation may never review how results were reached.

Distance learners may resort to multi-tasking when competing with demands for time from work, family, and social expectations. Multi-tasking habits can have negative influence on the effective use of learning skills. According to Crews and Russ (1012) "The existing research reveals that multitasking has an impact on productivity, frequency of error, critical thinking skills, and the ability to concentrate; some research shows multitasking may even contribute to Attention Deficit Trait" (p. 58).

Training the mind requires due diligence toward a prioritized process. Comprehensive reading, scholarly writing, critical thinking, and metacognitive reflection are learned skills. Student efficacy can be strengthened through using prioritized processes. However, the leaner must be guided toward understanding how the process steps must be followed. Guiding a learner to become cognizant of their learning ability requires understanding learning. Training the brain is a significant component of education. Too much emphasis on educational assessment in view of a training approach can undermine the confidence and efficacy of the learner as correction becomes the practice versus learning.

Untimely disruptions resulting from external actions may undermine learning intentions. Distance learners must constantly compete with family, work, or social obligations. These obligations often disrupt the planned learning process. Gonzales and Mark (2004) posited that it takes the average worker up to 25 minutes to refocus on a task after an interruption. Learners are often competing with external events to manage learning time. Therefore, the planning of a learning structure is vitally important to the success of the learning plan. Setting learning goals is the best approach.

Application of Learning Goals

Declarative and procedural knowledge differ. Declarative or conceptual knowledge enters the brain through sensory perception. Knowledge retained through rote learning, delivery, and observation is conceptual. Content is interpretation from presentation, observation, and not experience. A learner can spend an enormous amount of time reading material. Without application of the material, it remains perceptional knowledge. Procedural knowledge is learned process. It is how the conceptual knowledge is applied. Learning structure involves awareness of

learning skills. A learning structure is prioritized process that is planned, implemented, and revised through constant learner evaluation.

Self-regulation in learning requires planning. Planning learning requires understanding learning goals. The SMART Goal process is excellent prioritized learning processes encompassing distal and proximal goal planning.

SMART is an acronym for strategic and specific, measurable, attainable, result oriented, and time bound.

1. Strategic and specific - the goal targets a specific learning outcome and requires a strategic plan answering questions of who and what.

2. Measureable - the goal success is measureable for the student by answering the question of how.

3. Attainable - the goal is attainable in a specified strategically structured timed plan.

4. Result oriented - the goal is aligned with continued progress related to other prioritized goals leading to an outcome.

5. Time bound - the goal has a specific completion date. This answers when.

Learners that plan learning do so with an awareness of their brain based ability. Constructivist methods challenge students to reconstruct knowledge through critical thinking initiated from cognitive dissonance. Reinforcement of good learning structure practices empowers students to review formative feedback with objective views. Connecting to the student's reality should stem from differing aspects of behaviorist, constructivist, and cognitive learning theories. Gredler (2005) stated, "A characteristic of learning theories is that they address the underlying psychological dynamics of events" (p. 17). Engaging with constructivists

instructional design supports thinking motivating individual cognitions from student experience (Schunk, 2004).

Self-motivation is a vital aspect of empowerment for the distance learner. The ARCS model provides an excellent example for the components necessary for a student to address self-motivation. The ARCS model components are A-attention, R-relevance, C-confidence, and S-satisfaction.

1. A - Attention addresses the generative aspects of sustaining a learner's curiosity to maintain engagement with content for application to the learner's reality. Establishing multiple means to generate student interest motivates a student to stay engaged.

2. R- Relevance addresses the learner's approach toward how the supportive aspects of the learning opportunity can contribute to the learner meeting expected outcomes. The student establishes self-goals over and above the course expectations to meet personal expectations versus just meeting external expectations.

3. C - Building confidence includes specific aspects such as verification of clear expectations. Students must clarify personal expectations, as they are needed for progressing through curriculum. Students can be overwhelmed with too much detail. It is important students pace their learning process as each challenge is presented. The success of a student's self-initiated process through learning from failures is a natural means of strengthening learning skills. Gaining confidence occurs as students use self-initiated skills to exceed the course expectations and learn from mistakes.

4. S - Satisfaction addresses the learner's sense of accomplishment strengthened by their desire to learn. Every student regardless of age or status must rise to the learning occasion and feel internally satisfied with the challenge and the outcome. Just as an

instructor applies these components to learners in a classroom setting, a learner must

develop an understanding that these components can be applied for improving

learning experiences and outcomes.

Reconstructing retained knowledge must be a student centered practice. Providing

formative feedback focused on process should be a main stream instructional strategy. Teachers

must target the student's reality and require students to live up to the student's expectations.

Proficient learning employs considerable use of procedural formative feedback. Nicol and

Macfarlane-Dick (2006) argued, "Good quality external feedback is information that helps

students trouble shoots their own performance and self-correct: that is, it helps students take

action to reduce the discrepancy between their intentions and the resulting effects" (p. 208).How

delivery and intention of formative feedback are delivered by instructor are integral to good

student centered learning.

Structured Learning Practices

Cognitive learning theory supports the information process learning theory. According to

Driscoll (2005) "When learning occurs, information is input from the environment, processed

and stored in memory, and output is the form of some learned capability"(p. 74). Working

memory holds chunks of knowledge to transfer from short term memory to long term memory

for retention. Integrating instructional activities that require students to engage the content

differently from their reality increases the building of synapse and dendrites. Long term memory

stores knowledge for recall through building new pathways creating new synapses and dendrites.

Cognitive processes, individual learning habits, and metacognitive comprehension contribute to

perceptions (Gredler, 2005). According to Willis (2007) "the more regions of the brain that store

data about a subject, the more interconnection there is. This redundancy means students will

have more opportunities" for retention of knowledge strengthening retrieval. "This cross-referencing of data means we have learned rather than just memorized" (p. 311).

Providing examples of structured learning practices can bring about awareness for students to revise learning habit perceptions through critical thinking. Learning structure suggestions can motivate a student's practical understanding for how changing learning habits can benefit his or her life. Learners may not be aware of the influence of external conditioning and ramifications. Student learning habits may be affected by socio economical and family characteristics. Creating a learning family is an excellent collaborative functional practice benefiting effective learning structures.

Learning family structure is a method of establishing a behavioral family process. The family is aware, understands the importance, and benefits for the learner's engagement in the long term goal. The main benefit of the learning family structure is to improve family quality of life versus just the student's focus. Developing a learning family structured process is one of the best gifts a parent can provide for their children.

The Learning Family Structure Process

The below learning family structure process and steps have been shared with several online distance learners. The work Effective Learning Structures is published online through the Online Learning Consortium (Dakin, 2013).

1. When students manage learning time, time is not managing the student.

2. Establish a daily learning time of no more than 2 hours per day but every day. Schedule a minimum of one hour per day for each course taken. Engage every day in learning versus doing things to get them off a list.

3. Designate a specific private learning area you create for engaging with learning in the home that is secured without media interruption. No TV, radio, or cell phone is in the space.

4. Establish a reward system if you are a parent that provides a means of tracking the families support of your learning structure over time. This would include a 3x5-grease board listing each family member and a reward system.

5. Engage on Sunday each week with reviewing the assignments and begin assignments using the course text as a reference. By first setting up a formatted template before trying to read, learners develop an authentic assessment approach.

6. Clarify your understanding of the difference between internal and external of control characteristic habits for learning.

7. When we take responsibility to engage our reality with what we do with the subject content, we begin the process to participate in learning from experience to manage the next experience.

Learning Family Structure Steps

1. Students should engage all family members with a serious discussion at the kitchen table.

2. During the family discussion, the student must reach a point where they feel that all family members are on the same sheet of music understanding that the learner is attending school to improve the quality of life for the family and their future life experiences.

3. Once the family members realize the student is enrolled in higher education to improve the life conditions of the family then a request should be made.

4. The student should state, "Please, I need your help" to the family.

5. If the student is a parent, the student could also state, I am spending thousands of dollars of our future income to make this difference now for our family and our future.

6. The important aspect of this is to reinforce the perception that when an adult student demonstrates a consistent structured learning behavior, the family becomes a learning family within a number of weeks.

7. This is a strong benefit to have a student engage the family by demonstrating a disciplined strong learning structure.

8. For children in the family, the benefit is the children of the adult student develop the same habits.

9. The family learns to practice a structured approach for learning moving from external locus of control towards internal locus of control behavior.

10. The communication in the family begins to approach a responsive behavior versus a reactive behavior.

Best Practices for Distance Learning Students to Improve Learning Structure May Include

1. Clarify the weekly requirements at the beginning of a week to ensure understanding. Ask for clarification or email the instructor for a clarification if not certain of the interpretation.

2. If rubrics are provided in the course, clarify understanding of the rubric requirements to guide an understanding of the instructions.

3. Use a Library for research. Stay away from Internet search engines to use them as a source of reference content.

4. Always use a format reference guide to verify you are formatting, citing, and referencing your content that is taken from sources to support your original words.

5. Never copy content from the Internet to use as your words.

6. Do not wait until the end of a week or the due day to begin assignments. If the assignment requires an essay, start your template with headings early in the week and research each heading as you move through the week.

7. By setting up your writing templates early, you are engaging your mind with the content versus just getting something done.

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